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FRIENDLY ADMONITION

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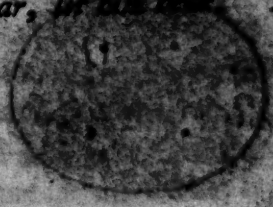
T O

And sold by CHARLES WRIGHT, in the Bookshop, next to the Edinburgh, ...

Such well-meaning and conscientious Persons
as have already joined, or incline to join
the Secession from the Church of SCOT-
LAND.

By a Minister of the Church

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Luke viii. 8.



EDINBURGH:

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EDWARD WRIGHT

Printed for CHARLES WRIGHT, 1752.

EDWARD WRIGHT

FRIENDLY ADMONITION.

IT is melancholy to observe such Numbers, and among these no doubt some well-meaning and conscientious Persons, running into Courses so severely condemned in Scripture, and so manifestly hurtful to the Interests of Religion; and so few giving themselves the Trouble to acquaint them with their Error, or apprise them of their Danger. The Task, it must be owned, is not inviting, nor attended with any great Probability of Success; for few can bear being told their Faults, and fewer still are willing to reform them; But in some Cases it is a Duty of strict Obligation, to tell our Neighbour his Faults, and to reprove him in any-wise, and not suffer Sin upon him. And though the Generality, and by far the greatest Part of all Sects and Parties in Religion, are strangely wedded to their own Opinions, and averse to every thing which makes against them; yet in all great Bodies of Men there is a certain Number, however small they may be, who love the Truth, and who would embrace it if they were fairly acquainted with it; who are willing to be informed, and can even bear to be admonished: And for their sake, if not for others, some Trouble ought to be taken. Though the Giddy, the Vain, the Self-willed, and Self-conceited, despise Advice, and disdain Admonition, the Conscientious and Well-meaning, the Upright and Sober-minded, will reverence the Truth when they see it; and though they do not, and perhaps cannot immediately embrace it, yet they dare not reject it. Their Pride and Self-will (for Pride and Self-will are too prevalent in the best) may put them on Methods of baffling the Evidence, or evading the Force of Truth; but their Reason and their Conscience are always on its Side: So that any one who is possessed of the Truth, and conscious to himself of the Uprightness of his own
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Intentions, may with great Freedom, and also with good Hope of Success, address himself to these. And to these principally, if not to these alone, I would direct what I have to say on this Subject.

I am told, and I have Reason to believe, that many of you have deserted the Church of *Scotland* on this single Consideration, That she is chargeable with Defections and Backslidings. This of itself, admitting it to be true, cannot justify your Secession; for this plain Reason, That all Churches are more or less chargeable with Defections and Backslidings; it being as impossible to find a Church or Society of Christians, who will not in some Degree depart from its fundamental Principles, as to find a House which will not deviate more or less from the strait Rule by which it is built: So that if we are to quit the Church or Society of which we are Members on account of its Defections, we must by the same Rule quit the next into which we enter, on account of its Defections; and thus must be seceding without End, and going from Church to Church, in quest of what is never to be found, a Church that will not backslide. It is not alledged, that the Doctrine of the Church of *Scotland* is contrary to the Scriptures; that her Discipline is contrary to sound Morals; or that her Worship is such as a good Christian cannot join in with a good Conscience. But it is alledged, that she hath Backslidings and Defections, Faults and Failings. And in support of this Allegation, the utmost Industry is used to pick up and gather together every Blemish and Defect, every wrong Decision and false Measure, which can be charged against her; that so, by blackening the Church, you may justify yourselves. But is this fair Dealing? Would it be thought just or charitable to treat any single Christian in the same manner in which you treat the Church? And how would you love to be so dealt with yourselves? Let me suppose, that some one of your Neighbours should complain to your Children of the Management of your Family-affairs; that Things were not as they ought to be, and as
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they were wont to be in your Father's or Grandfather's Time; and by such Suggestions endeavoured to alienate their Affections from you, and their Brethren and Sisters; would you not bitterly complain of such Proceedings, even though the Things alledged were partly true? And if your Children gave Ear to such Complaints, and suffered themselves to be so far influenced by them, as on that account to quit the Family, and renounce all Relation to you and your other Children; would you not think they acted an undutiful and unnatural Part? No doubt you would. Now, what if the Church of *Scotland* should enter this Charge against you? or what if your own Conscience shall some time hence enter this Charge in behalf of the Church? How will you answer it? You are at present under no Apprehensions of any such Charge; but you ought to consider, that your Minds, may be, are presently under the Influence of Prejudice and Passions; and you ought also to take it into your serious Consideration, that a Time is coming when Passion and Prejudice will be silenced, and all the Mists arising from them will be driven away like Smoak before the Wind; and that then our Actions, and the Actions of other People, will appear in a very different Light from that in which they appear at present.

But the Generality of you, not contented with charging the Church with Defections and Backslidings, have alledged, that she is become so corrupt, as that you cannot any longer continue in her Communion; but are obliged in Conscience to separate from her, and to lift up the Standard of a Testimony against her. This is a heavy Charge against the Church, and would need to be well supported. When you say of the Church of *Scotland*, that she hath Faults and Failings, Backslidings and Defections, you say no more than what may be said of any Church: But when you charge her with such Corruptions as render it impossible for a good Christian to hold Communion with her, you alledge what ought not to be said of any Body of Christians, but on the best Proof. If one says of my Friend,

my Kinsman or Acquaintance, that he hath Faults and Failings; I let it pass, because every one is chargeable with Faults and Failings: But if one will go further, and say of my Friend, that he is a Person of such worthless Character, that no honest Man will keep him Company; I will oblige him to prove what he says, or reject it with Indignation as a vile and unjust Calumny. This Justice is due to a Friend, a Neighbour, or Acquaintance; and is due from you to the Church: And therefore you must not content yourselves with strong Assertions, (for it is easy to alledge, and by Allegations to defame the best Man, or the best Society of Men); but you must support what you alledge with full Proof; otherwise, in place of a Vindication, you involve yourselves in greater Guilt.

You have been told, that the Church of *Scotland* hath suffered great Incroachments to be made on her Authority by the Civil Magistrate; that she hath been slack in censuring Heretics; and that she herself hath made Incroachments on the Rights of the Christian People in the Settlement of Parishes. All this you have been often told; and I suspect have too easily admitted as true, and upon these Grounds you think yourselves fully justified in your Secession from the Church. But I have no doubt of convincing you, that ye have proceeded with less Circumspection, and with more Precipitancy, than ye ought in a Matter of so great Consequence. I will allow, at least I will not at present dispute, that the Church may be blameable in all these respects: But nevertheless you are not justified in your Secession; for this plain Reason, That your blessed Saviour and his Disciples did not secede from, but continued in the Communion of a Church much more corrupt and degenerate in all these respects than the Church of *Scotland*. Perhaps this Observation was never made to you before, or you have never taken this Part of your Saviour's Conduct under Consideration; and therefore I demand your Attention to it, that by it you may judge how far your own Conduct may be justified or condemned by it.

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You have heard loud Complaints of Inroachments on the Rights of the Church, since the happy Revolution, and the Accession of the House of *Hanover*; though it is well known, that the Church of *Scotland* was never so little disturbed in her Rights, and never enjoyed so much Peace as since these happy Periods. But you have heard great Complaints of Inroachments by these Princes; and these Inroachments have been represented as sufficient to justify your Secession. But is it possible, that you can think yourselves justified by this, when you consider, that the Church of God in our Saviour's Time suffered much greater Inroachments than those complained of? Do but consider, that, in the Time of our blessed Saviour, the Emperor of *Rome* had not only invaded and inroached upon that Jurisdiction which God himself had settled in his Church, but had in a manner set it altogether aside, by assuming to himself a Power of determining by himself, or his Deputes, in all Causes, civil or sacred, as he saw fit: Do but consider this, and that our Saviour and his Disciples did not withdraw from the Communion of the Church on this account, and then judge of your Secession. You have heard Complaints of the Exercise of the Patrons Right of Presentation; and this is daily insisted on, not as a Grievance, but as a sufficient Ground of Secession. But your Saviour and his Apostles did not think of withdrawing from the Church, though the *Roman* Emperor not only presented to the Priest's Office, but, setting aside the express Appointment of God, put in and turned out of the High Priest's Office, whom he pleased; and sometimes put into it very worthless Persons. Ye have heard the Judicatures of the Church reflected on, for not punishing with greater Severity certain Professors of Divinity. But how far the Church acted right or wrong with regard to these learned Men, is not easy to determine; because it is not easy for any, but Persons of Learning, to judge of their Opinions; and ye ought not to be rash in taking the Assertions of your Leaders against them, and against the Church on their account. It is true, that excepting one, who
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was suspended for Life, none of them were found censurable by the Church. But, supposing this blameable in the Church, it will not justify your Secession; because our blessed Saviour continued in the Communion of a Church, which bore with much grosser Heretics, even the Sadducees, who denied the Resurrection from the Dead, and the Being of good and bad Spirits. You cannot but be very sensible of a very great Difference betwixt your Conduct and the Conduct of our Saviour and his Disciples; and you ought from hence to suspect, that you have been misled, and that you have been to blame in suffering yourselves to be misled. I do not blame you for being mistaken about several things which were in controversy betwixt your Leaders and the Church; because they are Matters which may easily be mistaken and misrepresented, and of which one cannot form a certain Judgment, without more Knowledge than the Bulk of private Christians can pretend to. But I blame you much, for judging of, censuring, and condemning the Church, upon the Report of her Adversaries, and in Controversies in which ye are not competent Judges; and I blame you still more for going all the Length of a Secession, without attending to what ye might have easily understood, and could not be altogether ignorant of, the Practice of your Saviour and his Disciples. For had you looked into your Bibles, and regulated yourselves by what you read there, and not by the Opinions and Practices of angry Men, you had not withdrawn yourselves from the Communion of the Church. You might have complained, and you might have seen Reason to complain; for while we are in this State of Imperfection, we will see many Occasions of Complaint against ourselves and others: But had ye kept the Practice of your Saviour in your Eye, you would not easily have been induced to make so terrible a Breach in the Church as ye have made. There have been great Clamours raised against the Church of *Scotland*, for not renewing the Covenant which our Fathers entered into in perilous Times; and this too hath been made a Pretence for deserting her Communion. But did

did our Saviour or his Apostles withdraw from the Communion of the Church in their Times, because they did not renew the Covenant which their Fathers had entered into? Or did our Saviour insist upon a Renewal of that Covenant; though, as I have represented, their own Defections, and the Inroachments made upon them, were greater than ours? But the Conduct of our Saviour and his Disciples is totally different from, and opposite to the Conduct of the Seceders from the Church of *Scotland*. Our blessed Saviour, by virtue of that Authority with which he was invested, openly condemned the Church in which he lived, for their Errors in Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship; and sent forth his Disciples to call them to Repentance: But neither he nor his Disciples withdrew from the Communion of the Church. Though he declared, that they had not only corrupted Religion, but, in some Instances, had made void the Law of God by their own Traditions; yet, as it were on Purpose to set an Example to his Followers, which many of them have paid little Regard to, he himself and his Disciples behaved on all Occasions as dutiful Members of the established Church; and at the same Time that he warns his Disciples against the corrupt Example, he charges them to pay all due Regard to the Instruction of the public Teachers.

And now that I have brought your Conduct to the true Test, the Practice of our Saviour and his Disciples, you must allow me to expostulate with you upon it. Is there not a plain Indecency, in pretending to be more strict and scrupulous than our Saviour and his Disciples, by withdrawing from a Church from which they would not have found themselves under any Obligation to withdraw? And is there not something worse than Indecency in doing so, when you have so plain a Direction from your Saviour how to regulate yourselves in such Cases? May not I be allowed the Freedom to tell you, that ye have hearkened too much to Men, and too little to your blessed Master; and that, in this Particular, you have been more influenced by the Passions, the angry Passions of disappointed Men, than by the Example

Example of the meek and lowly *Jesus*? Your Teachers have lifted up their Voice like a Trumpet, not against the Impiety and Immorality of the Age, the Lying and Backbiting, the Intemperance, and Injustice, and Extortion, which so commonly prevails, (for I do not hear, that they exclaim so much against these Vices, as against our happy Constitution in Church and State): They have lift up their Voice, I say, against Church and State; especially against the Church; and because some Things in it are not to their Mind, they have called upon you to come out from her Communion, and to lift up the Standard of a Testimony against her. A strange Call indeed, and never before heard in the Church of God! For look to the Practice of our Saviour and his Apostles, of the Patriarchs and Prophets, and of all the holy Men recorded in Scripture, and see if you can find a Precedent for the Members of the Church going out of the Church, to lift up the Standard of Testimony against her. You shall find the People of God commanded to separate themselves from the Society of Idolaters and notorious Sinners, but not from the Church. You shall find the Church of God running into Defections and Backslidings in every Age and Period, and the Prophets and public Teachers condemning these Defections, and the People of God bewailing them in secret; and, what deserves your particular Attention, you will find God promising to heal these Backslidings, and to bring about a general Reformation in his Time. But this Practice of making a Rent in the Church, under the Notion of a Testimony, and turning that Testimony into a Banner of Defiance against the Church, is without all Precedent in the Old or New Testament, and seems to be copied from the Men of the World. Indeed the Humour of forming Cabals and Factions within the Church, began early among the *Corinthians*, and was severely reprimanded by the Apostles. And to what does the Apostle ascribe it? Even to the same carnal Principles which breed so much Disturbance in civil Society: *For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye*
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not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Civil History affords us many Instances of Grantees and Demagogues forming to themselves Parties and Factions, under the plausible Pretence, that they and their Adherents are the only true Patriots; and with that Pretext spreading a Banner of Defiance against the State of which they are Members. And at Elections to civil Offices, and particularly at the Election of a Member of Parliament, it is common for the weaker Side to withdraw and separate themselves, under the Pretence, that they and their Adherents are the only legal Meeting. Such Things are every Day practised by carnal Men, with carnal Views; but they are utterly abhorrent from the Spirit, and destructive of the Interests of Religion.

You will perhaps be offended, if I ascribe your going out of the Church, to lift up the Banner of a Testimony against it, to the same carnal Principles by which the Men of the World are influenced in like Cases. But ye ought to suspect it, for the Heart is deceitful; and ye ought the rather to suspect it, that your being deprived of the Power you once enjoyed in settling Ministers, is the chief Defection you complain of, and the chief, if not the sole Cause of your Secession. It is generally believed, that if you had not been deprived of this Power, which you are so fond of; and if the Ring-leaders of the Secession had not touched this tender String, and harped upon it perpetually, as they do, it would not have been in their Power, by all their Clamour on other Subjects, to have made so great a Breach in the Church; and this affords a sufficient Ground to suspect, that your Secession flows chiefly, if not wholly, from that Love of Power, that Disgust and Discontent at being deprived of it, which breeds so great Disturbance, and creates so much Mischief in civil Society. Not that you are to be blamed for being fond of Power, for that is natural to Men; or for being discontented at your being deprived of the Power you once enjoyed, for that also is natural, and almost un-

avoidable : But what you are highly blameable in, and what, be assured, your Consciences will, sooner or later, charge home upon you, is, your raising so horrid a Combustion in the Church of God on this account. For he is not a good Man, who will maintain a Claim to Power, at the Expence of the Public; and who is not willing rather to drop his Pretensions, even to what he believes to be his Right, than destroy the Society of which he is a Member. Had the Noblemen and Gentlemen who were lately stript of their Jurisdictions by Act of Parliament, entered into a Combination against the State, or refused Obedience to the Government on that account, they would have been punished as Traitors; even though they thought, as some of them did think, that they were hardly dealt with, in being obliged to part with their Birthright: And you, my Friends, whatever Opinion you may have of your Right to chuse your Ministers, have Reason to fear, that ye have incurred the Displeasure of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Disorder you have bred in his Kingdom, and the Hurt you have done to his Interest on that account.

I doubt not but you believe, that ye have a Right from the Scriptures to chuse your own Ministers; but I very much doubt, whether you have taken proper Pains to inform yourselves about this Right; and if that is the Case, you will never be able to answer for your Conduct. You ought not surely to have taken this Right for granted; nor ought ye, in a Matter of such Consequence, to have taken it upon the Assertion of your Teachers; but before ye ventured upon a Division on that account, ye ought to have looked into the Scriptures, to see whether ye had such a Right or not. For what if after all there be no such Thing? What if there shall not be found the least Trace of any such Right, in all the Writings of the Apostles or Evangelists? What if in all the Settlements made by the Apostles and Evangelists, there is not one Instance of a Settlement by a popular Call? And if in all the Directions given by the Apostles to the Evangelists about Settlements,

elements, there is no Direction to call for the Votes of the People? You will wonder much if it should be so; but if you look into the Scriptures, you will find that it is really so; and to satisfy you that it is so, you may observe, that your Teachers have never attempted to condescend on any such Proofs, but have gone about to prove your Right another Way, even by doubtful and uncertain Reasonings on Passages of Scripture that have little or no Relation to the Subject. There are three Texts, and but three that I remember, which are offered in Proof of this Right; and to any one who considers them, it will appear, that they make nothing to the Purpose.

Ephesians iv. 11. 12. it is said, that *he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; for perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, for edifying the body of Christ.* Here is a plain Grant of so many Church-officers from Christ to his Church, and express Mention of the End for which he gave them; but where is there Authority for the People to elect them? You suppose, that a Right to elect them is implied in the Grant. But that is not the Case: For a Right to the Officers, and to all the Benefits of their Labours, is one Thing, and a Right to elect these Officers is another; and it is well known that the one does not follow upon the other. His Majesty makes a yearly Grant of Catechists and Preachers for Reformation of the Highlands and Islands of *Scotland*, and the People in these Parts have, by virtue of that Grant, a Right to these Teachers; but they have no Right at all to elect them. In like manner, a Nobleman, a Gentleman, or the King, grants a Teacher of Logic, Mathematics, or Divinity, to one of the Universities of *Scotland*; by virtue of which Grant, all who attend these Universities with a View to study these Sciences, have a Right to these Teachers; but would have no Right to elect them. But that a Right to elect these Teachers is not implied in the Grant made by our Saviour, appears from the Grant itself, which extends to extraordinary as well as ordinary Teachers; and you

do not suppose, that the People had any Hand in electing the extraordinary Teachers. Our Saviour himself sent forth the Prophets and Apostles, and the Apostles sent forth the Evangelists; and, in like manner, the Apostles and Evangelists settled ordinary Pastors in the several Churches, without calling for the Votes of the People. So that nothing can be fairly inferred from this Text in favour of your Right of Election. It is alledged, That the People had a Vote in chusing an Apostle; and therefore ought to have a Vote in the Choice of their Ministers. But you must know, that an Apostle could not be chosen by Votes, it being essential to the Apostolic Office, that he should be immediately appointed of God, or by our blessed Saviour. You may suppose, that the People had a Hand in making the Leet of Candidates for the Apostolic Office, and therefore ought to have some such Power in the Settlement of Parishes. But a Right to make a Leet, and a Right to chuse a Minister, are different Things. Besides, there is not the smallest Probability that the People made the Leet, in filling up the Vacaney in the College of the Apostles. The Words insisted on are these, *Acts* i. 23. *And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.* Now, these Words may be as well, and much more fitly applied to the Apostles than to the People: For in the Verse immediately going before, the Apostle *Peter* had said, that one behoved to be ordained an Apostle who had kept Company with our Saviour and his Disciples, from his first entering on his public Ministry to the Day of his Ascension; and then follows, *And they appointed two, &c.* Now, I appeal to any one of common Sense, whether the Apostles themselves, who constantly attended our Saviour, or the People, who saw and heard him occasionally, were the fittest to pitch on two who had kept Company with him from his entering on his public Ministry? and which is most probable, that the Apostles actually named two of their own Acquaintances, or left it to the People to do it? It was necessary, that there should be a competent Number of Witnesses to this

this solemn Action, lest it should afterwards be alledged, as was done in the Apostle *Paul's* Case, that the Person ordained had derived his Commission from Men, and not from God. And therefore the Apostles did nominate two, and cast Lots for them in the Presence of one hundred and twenty Christians: But there is no Occasion to suppose, that these Christians had any other Share in this solemn Action, than to be Spectators and Witnesses, and to join in the Appeal which was made to God by Payer, and the casting of Lots. And to draw Conjectures from thence, or from any thing contained in this Passage, in favour of the People's Right to elect their Ministers; shews plainly, that the Advocates for this Right are ill provided in Arguments.

It is alledged by some, That because the People were allowed to chuse the Deacons, they ought also to be allowed to chuse their Ministers. And they give this Reason for it, That the Office of a Minister being of more Consequence than that of a Deacon, they ought rather to have the Choice of the one than of the other. But this is doubtful Disputation, and not Scripture-proof. It is true, that the Office of a Minister is of more Consequence than that of a Deacon; and perhaps that is the very Reason why the People were allowed the Choice of the one, but not of the other. Besides, as the Deacons Business was to distribute the Money collected by the People themselves, they had a natural Right to chuse the Deacons; whereas the Office of Ministers being to act as Stewards of the manifold Grace of God, they had no Right to chuse the Ministers. Had the Apostles on any Occasion spoke to the People about the Choice of their Pastors, in the Style which they use about the Choice of Deacons, there would have been an End of the Controversy, and their Right of Election would have been acknowledged by all. But no body is bound to regard a Right that is supported by Mens own Conjectures and Reasonings on Passages of Scripture which have no relation to the Subject. I doubt not but you wonder, that all this while I have taken no notice of what our Saviour says, *John x. about coming in at the*

the door, and *coming in at the window*; which you have been accustomed to consider as a Passage very applicable to this Controversy about Church-settlements. But if you will lay aside Mens Opinions, and read the Chapter itself with any Degree of Attention, you will see that our Saviour had no such Subject in view; and that he is not speaking of the Manner in which Ministers ought to enter into the Christian Church, (for by the by the Christian Church had no Being at that Time, nor till our Saviour rose from the Dead), but of the Manner in which he himself entered into the Church, compared with the Manner in which those false Teachers entered in who came before him: And with this View he tells the *Jews*, that he *came in at the door*; by which he means, that he entered on his Office by a Commission from his Father, which was open and manifest to all; and that many who came before him, *came in at the window*, or *climbed up some other way*; by which he means, that they wrought themselves into the Office by indirect and fraudulent Methods, by lying Prophecies and pretended Miracles, or other such Arts as were then practised by corrupt Men: On which account, and on account of the Mischief they wrought in the Church, he calls them *thieves* and *robbers*. Our Saviour's Intention throughout this Passage is to persuade you to hearken to his Voice, and follow him as the Shepherd of your Souls; and to assure you, that, in so doing, you should not miscarry, but attain to everlasting Happiness. And your Teachers, by perverting this Passage, have turned your Attention from what concerns your spiritual Edification and Comfort, to that which, however it may flatter your Pride, can do no Good to your Souls. And now having given you a full Account of this Right to elect your Ministers, and the Arguments by which it is supported, I leave it to yourselves to judge, how far you have done well in giving yourselves and others so much Disturbance about it. For I dare say, that few of you would enter into a Process with one of your Neighbours before a Civil Magistrate, upon a Right so lame as this which hath bred so much Disturbance

ance to the Church. Had this Privilege which you claim, been purchased for you by your Saviour, you would not have been left to make it out by such doubtful Conjectures and uncertain Reasonings as you have recourse to. Had it been a Part of our Saviour's Legacy, as you have been often told, you would have found it somewhere in his Testament. Had the Call or Consent of the People been of such Consequence, and so essential to the Pastoral Relation, as you have been taught, the Apostle would not have omitted mentioning it in the Direction he gives about supplying Vacancies. Or if any such Practice had prevailed in the Apostles Times, we would have had some one Instance of a Parish settled by a popular Call, either in the Acts or Epistles of the Apostles. But as there is no Mention of any such Thing, nor any Directions about it, nor any Instance of the kind to be found in the Scriptures, you may rest satisfied, that there is no such Right, and that you have no Occasion to give yourselves Disturbance about it. And happy had it been for you in particular, and for the Church in general, if you had done so.

Indeed, my Friends, you have been greatly deceived, and grossly imposed upon, in this whole Matter: And I know not which to blame most; your Teachers, who have misled you; or yourselves, for suffering yourselves to be misled; or my Brethren of the Church, who might, and who ought to have undeceived you. If your Teachers had not talked such extravagant Things about this Right, it would not have entered into your Thoughts; and if you had examined your Teachers Assertions, and tried them by the Scriptures, you had not been led aside as you are; or if the Ministers of the Church, who understand the Scriptures, had taken a little Trouble to give you the true Meaning of the Passages insisted on, you would not have been carried away by false Glosses; at least, the better and more valuable Part of you would have still continued in the Communion of the Church. But so far it hath seemed fit to infinite Wisdom to permit you to experience your own Weakness; and well it is if now at length ye can
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be made sensible of your Error. I have shewed you, that whilst you could with a good Conscience continue in the Communion of the Church of *Scotland*, ye had no Occasion to separate from it, on account of the Defections and Backslidings of the Church; because all Churches are more or less subject to Backslidings and Corruptions; and that, admitting the Defections and Backslidings of the Church to be as great as they have been represented, ye might have safely continued in her Communion; because your Saviour and his Disciples continued in the Communion of a Church much more corrupt and degenerate. And I have shewn you, that the Method of proceeding in Church-settlements, which is the Defection principally complained of, and the chief Cause of the Secession, could be no just Ground of Complaint or Secession; because the People have no Right from Scripture to the Power which they claim. And because I meant to deal freely with you, I have shewn you, that your giving Ear to evil Surmises and ill-natured Suggestions against your Mother-church, was unkind and undutiful; that your believing, without sufficient Evidence, that the Church of *Scotland* was so extremely corrupt, as made it necessary to withdraw from her Communion, was rash and uncharitable; that your actually withdrawing from the Communion of a Church from which your Saviour and his Disciples would not have withdrawn, and thereby giving yourselves the Air and Appearance of greater Strictness and Purity than was practised by them, was highly indecent; and that your going out of the Church, to lift up the Standard of a Testimony against her, is a strange Proceeding, never before heard of in the Church of God; and that your doing so principally from a Disgust at the prevailing Measures, and a Displeasure at your being abridged of a Power you were fond of, might justly be ascribed to those carnal Principles which breed so much Disturbance in civil Society, or at least might be called a copying after the World, and not after Christ. All these Things I have set before you in the same Light in which they appear to myself. And now let me ask, in
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the Words of the Apostle, *Am I your enemy, because I tell you the truth?* I hope you do not think so; and therefore I will, without Reserve, and with all the Plainness which becomes a Friend, tell you, that you are wholly to blame in this Secession; and that you will never be able to account for it to God, and your own Consciences. Had you continued in the Church, and concurred with your Brethren, the Settlement of Parishes might have been put upon a Footing more agreeable to you and to them; or Measures might have been entered into, with the Consent of all concerned, for easing you and them of a Method of settling Parishes inconvenient in itself, and which has always been reckoned a Grievance to the Church of Scotland; at any rate you might have done your Duty, and exonerated your Consciences, and gone to your Graves in Peace, recommending the Church, in all its Interests, to its glorious Head; and hoping, that, in his good Time and Way, he would reform what was amiss, and supply what is wanting. But, by following the blind Direction of your Passions, you have put yourselves out of all Capacity of being useful to the Church, have weakened the Hands of your Brethren, given great Advantage to your common Enemies, and involved yourselves in the Guilt of a heinous Sin, a Sin severely censured in the Scriptures. I believe, that many have done this through Ignorance, and Want of due Information, and a mistaken Zeal for what they thought their Duty; though doubtless many more have done it through Pride and Wilfulness, and through a vain Desire of seeming wiser and better than their Neighbours, and through Fickleness and Love of Change. And I doubt not but these also have mistaken the Workings of their Passions for the Impulses of Zeal. But had you been acted by a Zeal for God and Religion, you might have found many better and more laudable Ways of expressing it, than by making a Rent in the Church. Had ye done as much to enlarge and strengthen, as you have done to weaken and divide the Kingdom of Christ; had that Money which you have laid out in support of your Se-

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cession,

cession, been employed in propagating the Gospel in foreign Parts, or in propagating Christian Knowledge in the Highlands and Islands of your own Country, or in relieving your Protestant Brethren abroad; or had these spacious Houses which you have erected to perpetuate your Schism, been designed for sheltering the poor and needy Members of Christ, the Aged and Infirm, the Widow and the Fatherless; you would have done great Credit to your Profession, and your Names would have been had in everlasting Remembrance. Wise and good Men would have approved your Conduct, and given you their Countenance and Assistance; and many who now rail at and ridicule you, and ridicule and rail at Religion on your account, would have been obliged to acknowledge, that God was in you of a truth. Such Fruits of Zeal as I have mentioned, would have yielded you Satisfaction in Life, and great Peace and Consolation at the Hour of Death. But what Peace, what Consolation can you draw from your Secession? For now that a Breach is made, principally, if not wholly, through your Wilfulness and Rashness, you are chargeable with the Consequences, and must answer for them to the Master of the Household.

But you will say, that you cannot be charged with Schism, because you only are the true Church. Ah! my Friends, this is the poor threadbare Pretence of all narrow-minded Bigots, who, in place of excusing, do but aggravate their Fault by such Uncharitableness. Is it so that your Teachers commonly entertain you at the Expence of the Church, representing you as the chosen Remnant, and your Brethren of the Church as Aliens and Apostates? And do you love to hear such Doctrine? Is this what you call being edified? Be assured, such Notions, however they may flatter your Pride, will not add one Cubit to your Stature. I am told, that some of your Teachers have the Boldness to represent the Church of *Scotland* as wholly polluted, as no Church of Christ, as the Kingdom of Satan; and to call on you to withdraw from her as such, assuring you of the Favour of God upon your so doing; using for this Purpose these

these Words of the Apostle, 2 Cor. vi. 17: 18. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty.* Now, as this is a manifest Abuse, and I may say a Profanation of the holy Scripture, I must beg it of you to take the Passage into your Consideration. Read from the 14th Verse of the Chapter, and you will find that the Apostle is not encouraging Christians to separate from one another, but from Idolaters, with whom it was not lawful to hold Communion. Or read, if you will, *Is. lii. 11* and *Rev. xviii. 2.—4.* where the same Invitation is given to the People of God, and you will find that it is not to come out of the Church, but out of *Babylon*. And I appeal to yourselves, whether it is fair, whether it is just or charitable, to apply these Passages to any Differences which may happen among those who agree in the Essentials of Christianity? Is there no Distinction to be made betwixt the false Measures in Government which any Church may fall into, and the Abominations of the Heathens? Or do we approve ourselves to God by separating from our Christian Brethren on account of such Measures, as we might do by keeping ourselves pure from the Impiety and Debauchery of the Heathens? Is this sound Divinity? But this is what is commonly got by quoting the Scriptures without Judgment, and without regarding the Intention of the sacred Writers. And this is what you have gained by putting yourselves under the Direction of Teachers who have not studied, and cannot be supposed to understand the Rules of interpreting Scripture.

You are the Church of *Scotland*, and we are the Church of *Scotland*; and they who have separated from you are the Church of *Scotland*, and they who may yet separate from us, (for we have yet some unsettled Spirits, who want but an Opportunity of forming some new Faction in Religion), no doubt will call themselves the Church of *Scotland*. But in reality the Church of *Scotland* is one Body, made up of all the good Christians in

Scotland, who, having one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, endeavour to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace. And, according to the Scriptures, no Man who is not of this Disposition can be a Member, a genuine Member, of any Christian Church. Vain and conceited Men may form Parties and Cabals in Religion as they fancy, and think as highly of themselves and their Adherents as they please; but God loves good Men, and none but good Men. He is not the God of the Seceders only, but also of the Church of Scotland; and not of that Church alone, but of all the Faithful in all Ages and Generations: *For every one who feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him; for he is no respecter of persons.*

Ye have differed indeed with wise and good Men, about several Things relating to the external Polity and Government of the Church, and ye have withdrawn from their Communion on that account. Are ye therefore wiser and better than they? Ye have treated as Heathen Men and Publicans, many as good and as dear to God as yourselves. Do ye think that God loves you the more on that account? And what though ye have built large Houses at a considerable Expence, and made large Contributions for the Maintenance of your Teachers; yea, what if ye had given the one Half of your Goods to feed the Poor, and your Bodies to be burnt at a Stake? The Apostle Paul would tell you after all, that *if you wanted charity, ye are nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, 1 Cor. xiii. 4. 5. 6. 7.*

It is not from any Pleasure I have in reproaching you that I make these Remarks, but from a Conviction of what you yourselves do not advert to, that the Spirit by which you are acted, is not the Spirit of the Gospel; and

and from a sincere Desire to reclaim you, and, if possible, to restore you to your Brethren, and your Brethren to you. It is grievous to see Mistakes and Misperceptions prevail among Neighbours, Friends, and Acquaintances. It is yet more grievous to see them take place among those who are connected by more sacred Ties; to see those who are Children of the same Father, Heirs together of the same Promises, and whose Friendship ought to be sealed and cemented by the Blood of Christ, estranged from one another; and not only estranged from, but exasperated against each other, refusing to sit down together at the same holy Table, as if they were not Children of the same Father, and Heirs of the same Promises, and did not bear the same Relation to the one blessed Mediator betwixt God and Men, the Man Christ Jesus. This, I say, is, and ought to be a Subject of Lamentation with all good Men. It is grievous, and it must be grievous to the Heart of any good Man, to see honest Men and real Christians, and those who do and must acknowledge each other for such, refusing to join together in any solemn Act of Worship; and, in sullen Discontent, turning their Backs on each other, and betaking themselves to their separate Places of Worship; where, to widen the Breach, and heighten their mutual Animosity, they often hear Things to each other's Prejudice. And I appeal to any one who has the Heart of a Man or a Christian, if he is not oft offended at these continual Murmurings, Complaining, Taunts, and Revilings, which he meets with from both Sides, and in which some of both Sides take an ill-natured Delight? These are the Fruits, the unhappy Fruits of your Secession; as indeed they are the common, and almost unavoidable Fruits of all Separations and separate Communions; and which, however blameable the Church may be in some things, is wholly owing to your headstrong Rashness. You have disowned your Mother-church, renounced all Relation to your Brethren, and disclaimed all Share in that happy Constitution which your Fathers would have prized at a high Rate, which they longed to see established, and for which they poured

ed out Prayers to God; and for which they ventured their Lives. You cannot bear the single Grievance of Patronage; but you do not know, or ye have forgot the Hardships which your Fathers underwent. Ye carp at the Revolution and Union Settlements, and speak disrespectfully of that Succession of Protestant Princes under whom the Providence of God hath given Rest to the Church; and God, in his righteous Judgment, may give you and us a Race of Princes, whose little Finger will be heavier than their Loins. In short, ye have waxed wanton and kicked, (bear with me, my Brethren; and if ye are the Persons I take you for, ye will bear with one who tells you the Truth); through a long Course of Peace, and the peaceable Enjoyment of all spiritual Privileges, you have grown weary of your Mercies, contracted a Loathing of your spiritual Food, and a Contempt of your Pastors; and, in the Pride and Wantonness of your Hearts, and because ye are not gratified in one Thing, in which it is not in the Church's Power to gratify you, you have given yourselves up to angry Men, Men of rankled and exasperated Spirits, fierce and ungovernable Men; who, being for their turbulent Behaviour cast out of the Church, were no sooner separated from us, than they fell out among themselves, and, in the Fury of their Wrath, delivered one another to the Devil. And to keep up these Disorders, and convey them to future Generations, a new Race of Teachers have come out, less knowing, but not less violent than they, who scruple not to speak evil of Dignities, and to fill your Minds with Prejudices against all Ranks and Orders of Men, against the Nobility, the Gentry, the Ministers, and all Magistrates, supreme and subordinate; and all this under an Appearance of great Zeal for God and Religion. Such are the Measures ye have pursued, and such the Leaders you have devoted yourselves to. And now, if any are so obstinate, as still to think, that, in so doing, they have done wisely and well, well for themselves, and well for the Public, let them rejoice in their Leaders, and their Leaders in them. There is no Hope of reclaiming those who, o-
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ver the Belly of all Considerations, will adhere to their own Opinions, and their own Measures; nor is there any Reason to wish for their Return to the Church, unless they return to a better Mind. But it is expected, that the Candid and Sincere, the Well-meaning and Conscientious, and all who are truly concerned for the real Interest of Religion, will lay these Things to Heart.

I have given you my Thoughts with Freedom, and I hope without Offence. And it is your Duty to judge of what I have laid before you. If, under the Pretence of Friendship, I have gone about to seduce you from the Truth, you may, and you ought to reject what I say with the Contempt it deserves: But if what I say be true, and the Truths I have proposed to your Consideration be of Weight and Importance, and the Admonition I have tendered you be as friendly as I professed and designed it should be, then ye ought not only to take it kindly, and hear it patiently, but endeavour to profit yourselves by it. I presume ye are desirous to account to yourselves, that you may be able to account to God for the Part you have acted; and hope you will not do it slightly, and in a superficial Manner, but carefully examine the Grounds of your Procedure, and do not content yourselves with such Reasons as may bear you out before the World, or with such as may pass with yourselves at an easy Hour. I hope ye will see whether ye have such Grounds, such solid Grounds, to go upon, as will support you in the Time of Trial, in the Day of Distress, and at the Hour of Death, and at the dread Tribunal of God. And knowing that ye have not, and cannot have such Grounds to go upon, I thought it my Duty to acquaint you with it. Had I regarded the Opinion of others, or my own Suspicions, I had not undertaken this Task: For all I advised with told me, that it was in vain to speak to the Deaf, or to offer the Light of Truth to those who had no Eyes to see, or whose Eyes were so closed up with Prejudices, that they could not see. But I always believed, and do believe, that though this is the Case with many, it is not so with all. Nay I believe, that severals of you, if
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you knew the Bottom of your own Mind, are not satisfied with the Part you have acted, and the Breach you have made, though perhaps you will not now be easily persuaded to make up the Breach. I dare say, that if ye had the same Part to act again, ye would proceed with more Caution. But to undo what ye have done, when ye cannot do so without condemning yourselves before the World; to make up to those ye have deserted, and to break off with those with whom you have associated, when you may fear the Contempt of the one, and the Ill-will and Reproaches of the other; is what, I fear, you will not easily be brought to. And yet ye ought to think of it; it being better, according to the common Proverb, to turn Half-water than drown: For indeed ye have brought yourselves into a grievous Sin, a Sin, which, however lightly looked upon in the World, is ranked in the Scripture with the Sins which destroy the Soul. But nothing that I can say will avail, if God himself does not touch your Hearts and Consciences. I will therefore leave the Matter to God and your own Consciences, with only a few Advices, which I will give in as few Words as I can.

And, in the *first* place, If from what I have represented, or from what may be represented by any of your Friends; or if on reading the holy Scriptures, and reviewing your Actions in the Presence of God, your Conscience takes Occasion to admonish and reprove you, do not on any Consideration stifle its Admonition, or harden your Hearts against its Reproof. For Conscience is the Voice of God. Conscience hath a Right to be heard, and will be heard sooner or later, whether you will or not. If we will not hear the Voice of Conscience now, it will return hereafter with redoubled Force; for Conscience will lose none of its Rights. If we do not listen to the Voice of Conscience in the Day of Prosperity, we shall hear it in the Day of Distress; or we shall probably hear it at a dying Hour, when it will not be in our Power to undo what is done: Or if we baffle or evade the Challenges of Conscience in our Life, it will pursue us after Death; and then it will bite like

an Adder, and sting like a Serpent; and prove, as the Scripture represents, a never-dying Worm, to gnaw the Heart with insupportable Torment.

In the *second* place, If, under the Direction of Conscience, you enter into any Resolution of breaking thro' all Difficulties, and returning to your Duty, you ought, under God, to summon up all the Force of your Mind; and, in a Dependence on him, to exert all its Strength; because you will need it all on this Occasion. You have all Reason to expect, and you ought firmly to believe, that God will be with you: But in the Work of our Salvation, he expects and requires, that when he works, we should work. And in some particular Duties we must put forth all our Strength, if we hope for Success; and many a well-meaning Person has come short of his Aim by not doing so. There are so few Instances of Persons, who have once gone wrong in Religion, ever returning to the right Road; and there are so many Difficulties in their Way, arising from Pride, from Self-conceit, from Self-will, or, in one Word, from Bigotry, from the Shame of the World, and from a slavish Fear of Man, that I freely confess I have but small Hopes of your returning again to the Bosom of the Church. And yet no Man can believe more firmly than I do, that, Christ strengthening us, we can do all Things. And therefore I insist on this Advice, That, in a Dependence on him, you put forth all the Strength of your Mind in opposing your own Prejudices, and the Passions and Prejudices of other People. To which let me add this further Advice, That if you are overcome and baffled in your first Attempts, as possibly you will be, you do not give over; but renew your Attempts, and repeat the Acts of your Faith, till, through Faith and Patience, you obtain a Victory.

In the *third* and *last* place, Be much in Prayer to God. Though God has promised, and we have all Reason to expect his gracious Assistance on all Occasions if we ask it; yet we have no Reason at all to expect it if we do not. And as we have no Title to any Assistance from God, if we do not apply to him at all;

for neither have we any Ground to expect that Assistance which we may need on any particular Occasion, if we do not on that Occasion make a proper Application for it. Therefore, in the whole Progress of this important Affair, from first to last, and in every Step you take, you ought to betake yourselves to God in Prayer. When you are trying the Weight of different Arguments, and balancing them in your Minds, in order to come to a Determination, you ought then to betake yourselves to God, and beg his Direction, that you may not turn aside to the right Hand or left. When you are forming Resolutions to follow the Direction of your Conscience, over the Belly of all Difficulties and Discouragements, you ought then to betake yourselves to God, and commit the Purposes of your Heart to him by Faith and Prayer. And if, when you come to act, you meet with Resistance from without or from within, you ought then to call on God for Assistance. Yea, and if you fail in the Struggle, and are overcome, you ought again to return to God, and confess your Weakness, and beg his Pity and Assistance. This is the Course you ought to take; and if you persist in this Course, you shall experience to your own Comfort, to the Comfort and Edification of others, and the Honour of Religion; you shall experience what a weak Creature may do under the Direction and Influence of God's good Spirit. But two Cautions are here very necessary. 1. That ye be not secretly determined to follow your own Way at the very Time you are asking Direction of God; for that was the Wickedness of *Balaam*; and that God complains of in the Elders of *Israel*, *Ezek. xiv. 1.—6.*; and calls *setting up man's idols in their heart, and putting the stumbling-block of iniquity before their eyes*; and threatens to give up all such, as he did *Balaam*, to their own Counsel. 2. The second Caution is, That ye be not wilfully indulging your Passions and Prejudices, at the very Time you ask Assistance from God to resist them; or, which is little better, that you do not ask or expect, that God should enable you to act a conscientious Part, while you are
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at no Pains yourselves to do so. The one is gross Hypocrisy, and the other high Presumption.

These Advices may be of great Use on many Occasions, and particularly on this; and therefore I hope you will endeavour to follow them.

As to those Reflections you may fear on deserting your Party, and returning to the Church, I dare not promise that they will not happen; as little can I say that you can be unconcerned about them: But this I may safely assure you of, that tho' Fools may laugh, and wicked Men rail at you; yet the Wise and the Good, whose Judgment ought far more to be valued, will approve of your Conduct. And if from an unfeigned Sense of your Duty, a tender Regard to the Peace and Prosperity of the Church, you are desirous to be received into her Bosom, good Men will welcome you, your own Consciences will applaud you highly, and God and the holy Angels will look upon you with Delight. I could multiply Motives and Arguments to this Purpose, but it is needless; and therefore will conclude all with one Exhortation from the Apostle, which I hope you are not able to resist. *Philip. iii. 1: 2. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded; having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

As for you who have not yet joined, but incline to join the Secession; if you are such as do not mind Religion, or mind it no farther than to make a Noise and Stir about it, ye are not the Persons I am presently concerned with; and nothing I can say will divert you from following your own Way, running to Sermons and Sacraments as ye do to public Fairs, and running after favourite Ministers from the Tent to the Kirk, and from the Kirk to the Tent, as your Fancy directs. Ye will, in spite of all Advice and Admonition, listen greedily to all the Complaints you hear of the King and Parliament, of the Nobility and Gentry, and of the Church, upon Subjects you know little about; and

if your Minister disoblige you, or if you are displeased with his Measures, you will go to the Secession; and if your Minister is wise, he will let you go, it being of little Consequence what Church you belong to, if indeed you belong to any Church at all. But if ye are Men fearing God, conscientious and well-meaning Persons, then I charge you to beware of what you do; it being much easier to step aside, than after one has fallen into By-paths, to recover the right Road again. You will say that the Seceders are very good People; and I believe there are good People among them; but remember the common Saying, That all is not Gold which glisters. He is not always the stoutest Man who wears the boldest Look, nor is he the kindest Man who makes the fairest Show of Kindness, nor he the honestest Man who talks most about Honour and Honesty; neither is he the holiest Person who has the greatest Air and Appearance of Sanctity. *By their fruits shall ye know them,* says our blessed Saviour. It is not your Province or mine to judge who are good, and who are bad men, any further than they discover themselves by their Actions. We must all stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ, where every one must answer for himself, and not for another. Therefore judge nothing before the Time; but judge this rather, that no Man put a Stumbling-block, or an Occasion of falling in his Neighbour's Way. Ye are, I suppose, conscientious and well-meaning Persons, and if you go to the Secession, or shew an Inclination to go, your Example may have Influence on some who have as good Right to follow their Inclination as you; and their Example may also have Influence on others; and so the greatest Confusion and Disturbance will be introduced, to the great Discredit of Religion.

You will say, That you are most edified by the Seceding Preachers; by which I understand, that you are better pleased with their Manner of Preaching. But let me observe to you, that we are not always edified most with what pleases us best. For as that Food is not always the wholesomest and most nourishing, which is the

the most palatable; and as those are not in the most thriving Way who cannot relish plain Food, so our spiritual Edification is best promoted when we are disposed to receive sound Doctrine, from any Minister of blameless Life. It is natural, I confess, for every one to wish to have the best Teachers; but it is not possible, and it is too common now-a-days, for every one to insist for Ministers to their Taste and Liking. But it is criminal in a high Degree, to disturb the Peace of the Church, for the sake of our Taste and Liking; and he is but ill instructed in his Duty as a Christian, who will not give up some things which may appear most edifying to himself, for the Edification of the Body of Christ, and the Preservation of that strict Connection, and beautiful Harmony, and good Order, which ought to subsist betwixt all its Members, and by which it groweth up to the edifying of itself in Love.

You will say, That whether we join the Secession, or continue in the established Church, we ought to love one another as Christians, and as Brethren in Christ Jesus. But there is a great deal of Self-deceit in that Way of speaking; for there is a wide Difference betwixt what we ought and what we will do. How rarely do we see that brotherly Love so much insisted on in Scripture, prevail among Persons of different Communion? They may behave well enough as Neighbours, Friends, and Acquaintances; though, by the by, their different Religions, as they call it, has an ill Influence on their Behaviour in all these respects, and is sometimes seen to cool the Affections even of Blood-relations. But however they may behave in all these respects, they but ill acquit themselves as Christians; to say nothing of those vile Slanders, Reproaches, Taunts, and Jeers, with which the Scum of both Parties entertain themselves. Even good Men themselves, though they may behave to each other with Moderation and Decency, yet seldom with that Cordiality which becomes their Characters; and generally with a Coldness, a Strangeness, and a Distance, which ill becomes the Friends and Brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ. When they

they who love divisive Courses and separate Commu-
nions, talk of brotherly Love, they either do not mean
sincerely, or do not attend to what they say; for the
Thing is impracticable. It is natural, it is unavoidable
to us, to have different Judgments and Opinions; and
that our holy Religion allows: For, says the Apostle,
let every man be persuaded in his mind. But to split in-
to Parties, and carry the Matter of our Differences so
far as to set up separate Communions, is not consistent
with Christianity; and to pretend at the same Time to
regard each other as Brethren in Christ Jesus, is hard-
ly consistent with common Sense and common Hone-
sty. Will a Man refuse to sit down with me at the
Lord's Table, and yet own me for a Christian? Or will
he treat me as an excommunicate Person, as a Heathen
Man and a Publican, and expect that I am to em-
brace him with the cordial Affection of a Christian? No,
my Friends; these Things are incompatible. These
Absurdities and Contradictions are the Inventions of
silly Men, to say no worse, and have no Countenance
from our holy Religion. We are commanded to with-
draw from those who disown our blessed Saviour, or
obstinately persist in scandalous Practices, but not from
any good Christian. We are indulged the Liberty of
judging differently, yea and of regulating our private
Practice by our private Judgment; but I defy any Man
to produce any Scripture-authority for good Christians
setting up different Communions, founded upon their
different Opinions or Inclinations. And this Practice,
however little regarded at present, will be found one
of the Defections and Backslidings of our Day. The
Apostles, who by the Inspiration of God were fully in-
formed of the Genius of our Religion, and of the Genius
of human Nature, are most pathetic in their Declara-
tions against these divisive Courses. You seem to think
that there is no Harm in countenancing the Secession;
but read *Rom. xv. 5. Now the God of patience and con-*
solation grant you to be like-minded one toward another,
according to Christ Jesus; and 1 Cor. i. 10. 11. 12.
Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord
Jesus

Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same Judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? Rom. xvi. 17. 18. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

As to the Backslidings and Defections of the Church, if ye are not satisfied with what I have said already on that Subject, let me ask you, Whether ye yourselves are blameless? The Church of Scotland is, no doubt, liable to Defections and Backslidings. For what is the Church of Scotland, or what is any Christian Church, or Society of Christians, but a Body of weak fallible Men; who, in spite of all their Care and Precaution, must be in continual Danger of deviating from the Right? And what are ye, who thus complain of the Defections of the Church, but as weak, as fallible, as inconstant Creatures; who, in spite of all your most solemn Resolutions and Engagements, are perpetually backsliding and deviating from the Right? It will become those who are compassed about with Infirmity, to exclaim against the Infirmities of their Brethren. And with regard to the Church especially, it becomes private Persons to be modest and reserved upon its Backslidings and Defections. You will ask, Whether you are to observe a sinful Silence with regard to the Church? No; but there is a sinful Speaking as well as a sinful Silence; and if, as Solomon observes, in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, you are in great Danger of running into much Sin, when you take the Liberty to descant, as you do, on every Measure

sure and Decision of the Church. I would not impose absolute Silence on Children, with regard to the Faults of their Parents; but would have them modest and reserved; and should not like those Children who shewed too great a Disposition to listen to, or publish the Faults of their Father, or Mother, or near Relations. And if I found Children disposed to run away from the Family, on account of the Faults, real or supposed, of their Parents or Kindred, I would direct them to a better and wiser Course, to take care of their own good Behaviour, and to endeavour, by modest Remonstrances, to bring about a Reformation of what might be amiss in the Family, and silently regret what could not be reformed; but not to hearken to evil Suggestions, and by no means to desert their Kindred, or make a Breach in their Family; because that was undutiful and unnatural, and might be attended with many bad Consequences, and hardly could produce any that were good. And what I would say to them, I say to you: And if you are the Persons I take you for; if you have the Modesty, the Humility, the Docility of Temper, which is always found in the Children of God, and retain any kind Affection for your Christian Brethren, and Mother-church, I have said enough to keep you from the Secession, and to continue you in the Communion of the Church.

Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Heb. xiii. 20. 21. You are to be guided by the Church, and its Decisions, and its Silence, with regard to the Faults of its Members. You are to be guided by the Church, and its Silence, with regard to the Faults of its Members. You are to be guided by the Church, and its Silence, with regard to the Faults of its Members. You are to be guided by the Church, and its Silence, with regard to the Faults of its Members.



